



# tilt

poems by  
Moira Macdonald



*Tilt*

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For words, like Nature, half reveal  
And half conceal the Soul within.  
*-Tennyson*



With heartfelt thanks to Eileen, for her unwavering support, encouragement, and, most of all, her love, and to Heather, for her generous, patient guidance and loving friendship.



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## Dawning

Fog ascending; deep, pervasive

Peacefulness abounds.

Nature waking, calling, chirping

Envelop me with sounds.

Ashes lighten, senses heighten

Wanness lifts into a ray.

All is gladness and aliveness,

Welcoming another day.

## Cycles

The deepening ochre of the sky,  
With sombre hues, declares intent  
To cast a watchful, graceful eye  
On thoughts and hopes that ought be spent.  
These beg for rest, for peace and end,  
To breathe their last at eve's descent,  
And tenderly be left to die.

One cycle turns, begins anew,  
The tiny, precious life form grows,  
To blossom, be, become, to flow,  
With specks of knowledge is imbued.  
The golden, ever-rising sun  
Breathes light and warmth and easy care,  
Till weariness and age declare  
The span of life has been and done.

## And yet

The heart is cracked in many a place,

The fractures deep as orthoclase,

Without consent

Defeated is.

And yet -

Bestrewn with expurgated hope,

Its halls the hue of heliotrope,

How wantonly

It treated is.

And yet it gurgles, burbles on,

A god among the pantheon,

Its fealty

Remains unbowed.

And yet -

## Fallen tree

Hour upon fierce hour,

In the dead of this

Violent night,

The wild, wild wind

Honed in

With his patient lizard tongue -

Darting and probing

For the flaw in your flank -

The one he will surely find.

For the thousandth time,

The wildling encircled you,

Till you finally succumbed

To his torrid advances,

And laid yourself down.

## Grave

My Grave I'll grace with Poppies and the Moon,  
With stems of inflorescent Aconite,  
Adorned, like Berenice's courtly tomb,  
Wherein she slumbers, ever sacrificed.

The Moon I'll usher in to guard the gate,  
Geminian dispassion e'er alert,  
No heaving Helios shall violate  
This dark, sepulchral grotto, nor subvert.

The Poppies strewn, a tapestry in red,  
For bloody deeds that cannot be undone,  
For Daughter's eyes ne'er opened, only bled,  
For wars profane and frightful, riven Sons.

O, Aconite! My thrice-beheaded friend!  
Medea's bane of wolf will serve me well,  
The hooded monk my Soul will spirit hence,  
To sleep, perturbed, eternally in Hell.

## Journey of a soul

My Spirit had been marking time  
For when it would be beckoned hence,  
Restless shifting on its feet showed  
Weariness of long pretence.

I'd drunk my years of learning dry,  
Had slipped, but learnt from my conceit,  
The open wounds, quick cauterized,  
Forgiven what was indiscreet.

A pact I'd made with those beyond  
To lend the strength within my arm,  
With gentle thinking to respond;  
All enmity and strife disarm.

In giving thus, my soul awoke  
To nature's gracefulness again  
To music, sweet, and words that spoke  
Of love - as deep as this, ne'er known.

So willingly, I'll play my part  
Enthralled anew with this fair plane,  
Until the time one soul departs,  
The other, freed, may do the same.

## Dying days

Shall we hold hands? - (am I being too bold?)

Those eyes that are piercing -

Ineffably old,

Stir mem'ries of someone I gave myself to

An aeon ago.

When loins were afire -

But all else was cold.

The heft of thy fingers that shepherd my plight

Repel me –

A little -

Too long is this night!

I beg thee to trace them over my brow,

Like rain on the rooftop -

Which douses the blight.

Raise up my head - be kind.

Acquiesce.

Wilt thou not grant me some tenderness?

How twig-dry my lips - so fragile and crazed -

Graze yours against them -

Yielding.

Possess.

Come lie down beside me,  
I'm tethered to thee,  
Dost thou recoil to see me this way?  
Be gentle - and tarry -  
Soon t'will be done...

Accosting the night -  
There's no haste any more -  
I beg thee for rest –  
Beseech thee.  
Tonight...

Enfold me in  
Thy embrace -  
Against thy breast –  
I die.

## What holds the universe together?

What holds the universe together?

What causes tides to rise and swell?

The thrush to pack its nest with down?

The thirst to know that won't be quelled?

From pulsing silences it springs,

From cricket's lonely chirruping,

All lies before you, to behold.

What holds the universe together

Is love, my child, is Love, is All,

From hand and heart and mind it flows,

Don't ponder on its rise and fall.

Embrace the wisdom at your core

And go, my child, to love some more,

And hold the universe together.

## Faith

And seeds of mustard well believe  
That all, with love, can be relieved.  
To love another as He has loved,  
That nothing enters from above.  
They understand, “Go sin no more”  
That kindness opens every door;  
That what transpires is what is writ  
That even mountains move a whit.  
We would do well to gently heed  
That faithful little mustard seed.

## Nature

A bird proclaims itself at dawn,  
Another trills, to greet the morn,  
A third, a bright concerto starts,  
The forest heaves with singing parts,  
And calm descends upon my soul.

I marvel at the clouds above,  
Embraced so tightly in god's love,  
No cares, no woes, no knitted brow,  
With easy naturalness endowed,  
Drink deep, my yearning soul.

How does each creature know of love?  
To play its role, from high above?  
Oblivious to our travails,  
With sweetest melodies regale  
Our doubt-filled, straining souls.

When I, alone, at long day's end  
With tiny wounds I aim to mend,  
Recall the symphonies anew,  
Then gladness bids my pain adieu  
And love resides within my soul.

## Disarm

Disarm the heart?

A futile task.

Disarmament,

Its living, breathing state.

The *mind* is he who cannot face

Being utterly undone...

The heart just shrugs –

Will never abdicate.

## A life was lived

They speak of death in muffled tones,  
With bended knee before the pyre,  
With beating breasts and clutching eyes,  
Perceiving nought of what went prior.

A life was lived, it loved and breathed,  
It wrestled demons - even gods,  
Bore its children, gave of itself,  
With its true purpose, was ne'er at odds.

Be glad, your hearts - arise, stand tall,  
It ought be such a joyful day,  
Farewell the soul that warmed your lives,  
And freely send the barge away.

## Wombat

Fat and black

And roundly packed,

Scampering before my feet.

It's far too late, you should get back

You *must* have had enough to eat.

Little fellow, I can hear you

Charging through the undergrowth,

In your haste to reach your burrow

Where I bet it's warm as toast...

[For Lucy]

## Fox

Look! A fox!

Making haste to disappear,

Furtively she lowers down,

Watchful eye and flattened ear.

Are there little ones awaiting,

Hungry in your clever den?

Pay no mind to us, go forth!

Disregard the world of men!

[For Alex]

## Leaf and I

I sipped the dew from a tiny leaf  
On a slender branchlet, drooped,  
That lingered on my walking path  
And led to my rebuke.

The night was all but spent and,  
With reluctance, giving way  
To trenchant early sun rays  
That precipitate the day.

No soul was there to witness  
What my folly then proposed,  
(And should there've been, I'll wager  
They would think me indisposed)  
The leaf, it offered moisture fresh,  
I gladly did imbibe,  
Oblivious to all -  
To nature's wonder did ascribe.

I thought I heard the leaf cry, "Ho!  
What give thee in return?  
Gratuitous, you've quenched your thirst  
My bounty thou must earn!"  
"The nighttime frost and misty drops  
Have chilled my inner bones.

Pray, hold me sweetly 'tween your lips

Your boldness to atone.”

I took the precious leaflet,

Laid it gently on my tongue,

Careful not to rend it

From the branch that overhung.

I fancied 'twas my lover's lips,

And softly did I taste

Its downy skin, its rivulets -

Such trust in me it placed!

I warmed its inner venules,

Imperceptibly but true,

Pledging to this wellspring

I'd redeem myself anew.

We languidly uncoupled,

Leaf and I went separate ways,

My soul replete,

I happily embraced the morning rays.

## I came upon a dying beast

I came upon a dying beast,  
Its neck lay twisted up and bent,  
What to do for its release?  
Unflinching hand it surely meant.

“You can do this monstrous deed,  
For do it now, you must”  
What I felt is what I did -  
T’was easy to adjust.

The final blow was firmly struck,  
What I did with what I felt -  
The beast, its ending breath did suck,  
No feeling, in us both, now dwelt.

## Deep

If I were a mollusc  
I'd sit on the seabed,  
Waiting for morsels to pass me by.  
I'd nod my hello  
To neighbouring krill,  
While figuring out if our moment was nigh.

A fish and a seahorse  
Go fluttering by,  
What tests of time are we being set?  
Do stop a while and tell me your views  
On all these marvels we're soon to forget.

What levers are pulled  
From far, far below,  
That so unsettle my minuscule brain?  
It often confounds me, I couldn't say why...  
Just vague little stirrings of imminent pain.

But enough of these musings!  
What good does it do  
To wrangle incessantly with how to be free?  
Do what you will, you Gods of the deep -  
I'm merely a mollusc, I can only be me...

## With apologies to Doctor Faustus

I, Thomas, forged a pact one night

With Satan's underling,

Oblivious to future plight

Her wiles I ushered in.

I'll wager she reported back

What gains she made with me,

To fawn and self-ingratiate

With Mephistopheles.

She vowed all earthly joys to share

With Bacchus' heady charms,

A panoply of lovers, fair

To languish in my arms.

"Your soul must be relinquished for

That prize belongs to me,

To place, triumphant, at the feet

Of Mephistopheles."

I countered her enticements, let

Her know I paid no heed

To revelry and wanton acts,

For my beloved, I plead,

"Should this unholy compact win

My yearning heart some ease,

I'll aid your misbegotten quest  
For Mephistopheles."

The deal was signed, in blood, no less,  
My word was not enough,  
Despite my dread, I must confess  
No pact could be rebuffed.  
The underling, her hand outstretched,  
The bloodied parchment seized,  
With reveries of lust assuaged  
By Mephistopheles.

The years all passed in tragedy,  
Much horror fast distilled,  
My thoughts recalled the Devil and  
The Faustian pact fulfilled.  
My soul, in time, lay at his feet,  
Self-slaughtered and diseased,  
The underling's malod'rous gift  
For Mephistopheles.

## The Farmer

Whose house is this he passes, well before the greying morn?

(His trudging boots the only sound, with heavy thoughts, forlorn)

At woodland's rim, embraced it is, so low and self-assured,

A bastion of certitude, from every strife inured.

Whose head lies easy in its arms, in lavish sleep encased?

(Not fraught with horror's dread that sweetest birdsong can't erase)

A flurry of disheveled sage along its garden path,

By embers' glow, a cat stretched long - oh, happy home and hearth!

Before the haggard blackness lifts around him, he is gone,

(Melding with the scrub, the empty creek bed, whereupon -)

He lay himself to rest a while, with weariness o'ercome,

Heeding, with surprise, the rousing woodland's pulsing hum.

I'd seen this man, this neighbour, mine, attending to his fields,

(This, though, many weeks before we learned what lay concealed)

So curt of speech, his rugged hand the briefest greeting gave,

Then toiled he on - as toil he would - till ceding to the grave.

## The Word

The Word digs in its talons  
When we are unprepared,  
Shunning scars already rent,  
Untrammeled flesh its fare.  
Letters writ in majuscule  
Emblazoned in your skull,  
Such, the might of Logos - Word  
Will leave your soul dehulled.

As you catch a fleeting breath  
It wheels around thrice more,  
Vespa's unremitting stings  
Eviscerate your core.  
Till nought remains - Death waiting,  
It circles, high above,  
To grasp you tight within its wings  
While mouthing one Word - 'Love'

## Dust

When I reflect upon my life, near cold,  
In the hours before the blackbird's piece  
Enlivens me, I've a need to release  
An invent'ry of deeds, plucked bare and bald;  
For, come the day discerning rulers run  
Across my span, my testimony's done.

Which spirit aide, with my defence, be tasked,  
Before my soul's appointed judges seek  
A deposition for missteps? Who speaks  
For conduct, tooth-combed through and left unmasked?  
What harm was wreaked? How have I interfered  
With fateful chance on this confounding sphere?

Thus, carefully, they'll brush the dust, as though  
In Egypt's cauldron, precious relics found;  
So with my heart, the living's fireground,  
Which way the scales will fall, the pebbles thrown?  
To obfuscate on earth - how simple there!  
But what my arbiters shall bring to bear?

## And my kind

Don't say I can't love with a *human* love,  
With the bravest love that applies  
The wretched law of union-as-one,  
From a cleavage a chasm-length wide.

Far better to stagger, ingloriously, home  
Than to flutter above all the fray.  
I'd happier pick at my leering wounds,  
Than to drop on my knees and pray.

If offered a choice, when time to away  
I'll stay with the slurry and grind,  
To live and love an additional day,  
Exulting with kin - and my kind.

## Tilt

When shifting consciousness occurs  
with a simultaneous tilt  
of the earth's axis, spring begets  
autumn in a pulsing heartbeat;  
the larkspurs, their drunken shafts will  
shed, like milt flaring heavenward;  
grey-white winged and wheeling higher,  
the kite hovers, addled - hovers  
among clouds smeared across the black-  
lung sky, while the mayfly's lifespan  
increases  
by point-o-nine of a second.

All along the ripe'ning wheat fields,  
stroked, ardently, by the first waft  
of fall, scatter their teeming yields  
of the season's new harvest, oft  
unmatched in its abundance,  
while evident for all who see  
and hear, the trumpeting out loud  
of their love and delight, unbowed,  
vuln'erable  
at the onslaught of Ares' son.

This is the synchronous shifting  
and tilt of the universal  
“I” and “You” – with the uplifting  
tune of like hearts; with dispersal  
of such good love and tenderness,  
that the gods themselves become less  
almighty of a sudden, to  
marvel at the audacious few  
who choose lives  
unbounded - autumnal - as spring.

## Both

Tiny, precious bloom

Caught beneath my careless gait

For us *both*, no room...?



In 2020, the southern Australian state of Victoria - and, in particular, its capital, Melbourne - was placed under severe lockdown for three months, due to Covid19. For one country Victorian, these poems are the result.



Love  
Life  
Death  
An afterlife..?

A selection of poems on these universal themes - with some levity thrown in for good measure...

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